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About
Met Office
Hadley Centre
Terms and conditions
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News
News release archive
Media Centre

Learn
About the weather
From the bookshelf

Services

Mobile text forecasts
Weathercall
Marinecall
Mountain weather
MetWEB
Talk to a forecaster

Links
Met Office data users
National met. services
Scientific interest sites
EA Floodline
Directgov
Freedom of Information

Contact
Contact us
Questions answered

Energy firms get switched on to escape charges

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Weather experts are set to help energy firms succeed in managing their risk when under estimating the electricity needs of England and Wales.

With the loss of the electricity pool under the New Electricity Trading Arrangements the Met Office has been working with electricity suppliers and generators who are preparing themselves for the new demands under NETA.

With the number of days when temperatures have fluctuated from seasonal norms up year on year - meteorologists believe that without tailored forecasting it could cost energy firms severe penalties if they get it wrong. Met Office records show that during the last decade the UK experienced its greatest weather extremes in history - with the lowest and highest temperatures ever recorded.*

Under NETA the need for short term forecasts will become imperative - and the nation's weather service has geared itself up to become more responsive to the needs of the energy industry.

The Met Office has developed a NETA package of services, which provide a range of forecasts from 36 hours ahead to 10 days ahead. The electricity supply and generation market needs to identify the demand and generation respectively in half hour time slots throughout the 24 hours.

The weather forecasts and observations provided under the NETA package, when incorporated into electricity demand models and other information such as days of the week, bank holidays and time of year, will provide electricity demand and generation requirements.

The Met Office is providing weather services for NETA to the majority of the major players in the electricity supply market in the UK as well as some of the major generators.

The Met Office's Commercial Division Energy Account Manager Barbara Richardson said: "Around 60% of energy demand is down to the weather and climatic changes which mean that it is a risky business to rely on historic data when buying and selling energy. With the introduction of NETA, companies will have to plan with tremendous detail to avoid shortfalls or buying too much power from generators.

"An unseasonably cold day can put huge pressure on electricity reserves and companies need to be able to respond quickly which is why we have developed a weather package containing three hourly forecasts for the first 36 hours, leading to six hourly forecasts for up to 72 hours ahead."

The delay in implementing NETA - it was originally planned to come in in October - means that some energy firms have had a chance to rehearse using more detailed demand planning. The Met Office's Commercial Division was also able to work with software developers within the energy sector to ensure a seamless delivery of new forecasting services.

"Our customers in the electricity industry are well aware of the possible impact of NETA and have had time to prepare for the loss of the electricity pool but there is real concern out there about the penalties they face if they get it wrong. The fact that it will come into force in spring when energy demand is less could prove to be a bonus."

**The highest temperature recorded was in Cheltenham, August 1990, when it reached 37.1 degrees Celsius. The coldest recorded temperature in the UK occurred on December 30 '95 when it plummeted to Minus 27 degrees Celsius in Altanaharra in northern Scotland.*

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